

WORD FROM WASHINGTON



Medicare Information Is Now More Accessible

by Nancy-Ann DeParle

(NAPS)—People over the age of 50 may be the fastest growing population on the Internet, and they are using Internet resources to search for information on such vital issues as health care.

A new Medicare survey shows that Internet access among people with Medicare, who are 65 and older, has skyrocketed from 6.8 percent in 1997 to 21.3 percent in 1999.



DeParle

One web site that averages seven million hits per month for health care information—including Medicare benefits, nursing home staffing levels, and health plan options—is the new and expanded Medicare web site at www.medicare.gov.

The award-winning web site now includes more features and information tailored to meet the needs of the growing number of older online users, as well as family members and friends who help them make their health care decisions. The improvements include:

- easier to find, read and print online information about Medicare, including information comparing health plan options;

- new, annually-updated, information about the number of plan members who have disenrolled from their Medicare+Choice plans.

- new staffing information for nursing homes across the country, which includes the number of registered nurses, licensed practical or vocational nurses and certified nursing assistants in each nursing home; and

- an improved screen reader that lets people with visual disabilities access the Internet. This tool lets users who have screen reader capabilities “hear” the words on the screen.

The new technologies being used at www.Medicare.gov will load faster for people who use their telephone lines for access, helping them move faster through the site.

The site was launched in 1998 as one part of the comprehensive National Medicare Education Program, which includes the Medicare & You handbook; 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227), a toll-free telephone line; and partnerships with local and national organizations across the United States. Medicare, the nation’s largest health insurance program, covers almost 40 million Americans over age 65.

Ms. DeParle is the administrator of the Health Care Financing Administration, which runs the Medicare program.